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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (8/19): Palestinian national  
dialogue needs political will and active Arab role

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Main Stories:  
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All dailies lead with news about the decision of the Israeli Ministerial Committee of Prisoners' Affairs, announced on August 18, to release 199 Palestinian prisoners. The decision is intended as a goodwill gesture towards the Palestinian Authority (PA) President, Mahmoud Abbas. The list of prisoners to be released includes two Palestinians who have been imprisoned for more than 25 years. The dailies report that the PA government welcomed this decision, quoting the Palestinian Minister of Information, Dr. Riyad Al-Malki, in a press conference following the cabinet's weekly meeting on August 18. During the same press conference, Al-Malki condemned the Israeli excavations around Al-Aqsa Mosque and called on the Organization of the Islamic Conference to pressure Israel to stop its plans to establish a synagogue and a bridge in that area. Al-Malki also said that President Abbas will head to Saudi Arabia on August 19 to brief the Saudi king about the latest developments in the Palestinian arena, the negotiations with Israel, and the Palestinian internal dialogue.

All dailies report that the PA cabinet decided during its weekly session in Ramallah on August 18 to allocate \$4.5 million to provide needy students in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with back-to-school supplies. The government also decided to allocate \$1 million to pay the first-semester tuition fees at local universities for students with high grades.

Dailies highlight news about the latest developments in the Palestinian national dialogue. According to an Al-Quds report, reliable Egyptian sources have confirmed that Cairo will host two dialogues for the Palestinian factions, most probably after the Eid Al-Fitr holiday [i.e. after Ramadan]. The same sources said that this serious dialogue will include the main factions: Fatah, Hamas,

Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The Hamas leader, Fawzi Barhoum, confirmed that Hamas will respect the outcome of the national dialogue. Al-Quds also cites a DBA report that the Khaled Abdul Majid, the Secretary General of the Palestinian Popular Struggle who currently lives in Damascus, confirmed that the Palestinian factions are ready to respond to Cairo's invitation and start dialogue. According to related coverage in Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, the Palestinian factions met in Gaza on August 18 and agreed that the aim of the dialogue is to end internal division and regain national unity. They also decided that it will be a comprehensive national dialogue based on the general national reconciliation document issued in 2006, the Cairo declaration in 2005, and the Yemeni initiative. The dialogue will cover: the formation of a national reconciliation government, the rebuilding of security systems at both a national and professional level, the activation of the Palestinian Legislative Council according to the basic law, and the implementation of the Cairo agreement to activate the PLO and to re-establish its institutions on the basis of democracy and elections. The preparatory steps would be: the immediate cessation of the politically-motivated arrest campaigns and the negative media campaigns between factions, the release of political prisoners, and the formation of a national committee to end the internal division, in which both Fatah and Hamas would participate.

Al-Ayyam spotlights statements made by Islamic Jihad leader Ibrahim Al-Najjar concerning the truce between Israel and Hamas. In a press statement distributed on August 18, Al-Najjar criticized the Palestinian's iron commitment to the truce, compared with Israeli's broken promises. He said that Israel is the sole beneficiary of the

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truce, as it is guaranteeing security on Israeli borders and is reinforcing and deepening the internal division among the Palestinian factions.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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¶1. Independent Al-Quds carries an editorial by Walid Al-Awad, Member of the Political Bureau of the Palestinian People's Party, entitled, "the Palestinian National Dialogue Needs Palestinian Political Will and an Active Arab Role" (8/19): "Despite the increasing talks and press statements claiming that the Palestinian national dialogue will be launched soon, many signs indicate that this is still far away from happening and will require redoubled Palestinian efforts and a more serious Arab role ... It seems that the [internal Palestinian] conflict will not remain exclusively in the Gaza Strip, but will extend to the West Bank in different forms. In this context, the political concern of Hamas to repair its relations with Jordan can be explained...by saying that Hamas is not yet ready to submit to what has been requested from it [by Cairo] to guarantee the success of the national dialogue ... On the other hand, despite President Abbas' July 4th call for dialogue and his subsequent tour of the Arab countries...and despite all his seriousness, there are attempts to put obstacles in the path of dialogue...and Hamas' attitudes and actions...such as political arrests, illegal closure of institutions, and delaying the implementation of President Abbas' order to release all the prisoners arrested following the Gaza beach explosion...reinforce these obstacles ... From the aforementioned, one can say that the desire for dialogue is one thing, while the existence of a political will and the readiness to submit requirements for its success is a completely different thing ... This painful attitude requires Palestinian efforts, especially from the left-wing parties..."

¶2. Independent Al-Ayyam runs an editorial by Hasan Asfour entitled, "Arab Agreement is a Condition for Palestinian Agreement" (8/19): "...Arab agreement, which should be based on the Arab-regional parties and countries with special influence...is an essential condition to reach what is needed [for Palestinian agreement]. Any agreement [note: it is ambiguous whether author is referring here to Arab or Palestinian agreement] should be based on two main things: the context of the agreement and the mechanisms that will guarantee

its success, including the Arab security force. This is the path that has no alternative if there is still 'an Arab desire' to end 'the big crisis'...and this requires not paying much attention to the individual attitudes of any party...because everything is clear...this [internal Palestinian division] has become a pure Israeli demand ... No doubt Egypt will be capable of finding a solution [to the internal Palestinian division], especially given the latest Arab moves, and the creation of a positive atmosphere particularly with Syria and other parties, in addition to Jordan's re-engagement with individuals from Hamas..."

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